

Philemon 1-21

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Sept. 3, 1989

There is one word that will send me scurrying through the fine print most ~~everything~~xx time I see it. And I see it often, ~~most every day~~ when I open my mail, or go to the grocery store, or listen to the TV. ~~That~~ When I see that word I know that somewhere there is a hook, a catch, something that will sooner or later take money from my pocket and put it in another's. The ~~word~~ word as I'm sure you have guessed is free.

Free reading bulb, the display at K Mart shouted, when you buy two sixty watt bulbs at the regular price. But when I walked one aisle over I found those same sixty watt bulbs to be priced at ~~more~~ a dollar and a half less.

Free shampooing of your carpet, the caller assured, but he neglected to tell me the shampooing would be accompanied by ~~an~~ hour long sales pitch for a new vacuum.

~~Reassurances~~ God gives his love to you, for free, in Jesus Christ. You are saved by grace. a gift. That's what I say to you week after week. Am I like all the rest? saving the conditions for the small print?

This morning it would certainly seem so. For our Lord speaks about what it takes to be his disciple. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes and even his own life he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. <sup>say farewell</sup> Whoever does not renounce all that he had cannot be my disciple. Grace? Free? a gift of love in Christ? Jesus words make it sound as if we are going to pay the whole cost. Everything.

Some churches are very explicit about the costs of discipleship. ~~Some~~ No drinking, no dancing, ~~nothing~~, giving 10% of all their income. Do they ask too much? Or not enough? Why only 10%? Why only drinking, dancing? Jesus said whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. All.

A man by the name of Philemon found out about that, ~~very~~ a very long time ago.

Philemon was a resident of Colossae, one who heard the apostle Paul preach

There was a man named Philemon. Through the Apostle Paul's preaching he believed in Jesus Christ. He learned how Christ had died for him, forgiven him. ~~From his~~ given him the promise of eternal life. He was a man filled with love for Christ, and for all his brothers and sisters in the faith.

Philemon had a slave. He owned this slave named Onesimus, just as you or I might say we own a chair or a house or a dog or cat. His slave was not a Christian, I suspect he did not even regard his slave as a person. Just a slave, another object, possession.

Onesimus, the slave, ran away, ran to Rome, found his way to Paul whom he must ~~not~~ have seen and heard in Philemon's home. Where he heard what Paul preached, he believed, he was baptized.

After <sup>instructing</sup> ~~training~~ him, nurturing him in the faith, Paul sent Onesimus back to his owner, along with the letter that is our second lesson today. What would be the cost of believing in Jesus Christ for Philemon? Paul makes some strong hints. He writes: If you consider me your partner, receive Onesimus as you would receive me. Receive the slave as he would receive his honored pastor. Receive him, no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave, as a beloved brother.

Under Roman law Philemon had the right to do whatever he wished with his slave, beat him, starve him, torture him, kill him. Under the rule of Christ Paul suggests that Philemon might do something startlingly new: receive his slave as a beloved brother. And in so doing renounce a valuable possession.

We do not know what Philemon did, though sitting where we sit in history it seems obvious what ~~was~~ was right for him to do. To release his new brother in the faith from slavery. It is obvious to us that believing in Jesus should have been very costly for Philemon, <sup>at a price</sup> ~~how~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ Christ might have changed how Philemon saw himself and his world.

~~Today~~ Thursday afternoon, I saw a black man get out of his car and enter the convenient store at the Landings. I began to memorize his license plate, and watch the store for trouble. I did it ~~was~~ without thinking or planning





that might mean.

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~~xxxxxxKxxxxxxwritingxxlettersxxixxxxxtoday~~

Free. When I declare to you that the love of God for you is free in Jesus Christ, forgiveness is free, eternal life his free gift to you, there is no fine print. In Ephesians we read: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

But when that grace grasps hold of your heart, who knows what it will cost you? Maybe food for your brothers and sisters in need, or your words and witness to those who have never heard of Christ. Maybe love and respect for those you once thought your inferiors, Maybe a transformation of the way you have seen your world and yourselfe Once God sought to work such a transformation in a man named Philemon, now he is working such a transformation in you.